

Brookings Institute, December 8, 2009

Washington, D.C.

5943

The Future of Iraq: The Kurdish Perspective

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be back at Brookings. We share many things, including the belief that intelligent discussion and wise examination of facts and reality can make our most hopeful theories come true.

When I think about the question raised by this topic - *The Future of Iraq: The Kurdish Perspective* - my emotions demand that I remember the admonition of a wise examination of fact. I see things from the Kurdish perspective and I see things from the Iraqi perspective. I even see things from the American perspective and - increasingly and startling - sometimes from the Turkish perspective.

Ideally, all those interests align. That is one of my personal wishes and that is also the desire of the Kurdistan Regional Government and, I would suspect, the vast majority of our fellow Iraqis, the Americans, the Turk and all our other friends.

But it is hard to say that is what today's reality == today's facts - prove. So in our time today I wish to share how we in the Kurdistan Region see the future of Iraq - both as we wish and as we see it moving.

On the positive, 2009 has been a year of significant progress in many areas. While that makes up hopeful for the future, it does not yet ensure all will turn out well.

Some are the positive changes are the result of old fashioned hard work and determination, to get to the next goal. Some are the result of help from old friends like the United States and surprisingly newer friends, like Turkey. I must be honest - I would have never predicted that by my next visit here would be after Turkey announced it would be opening a diplomatic consular office in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region. Two years ago, Turkey would not even acknowledge our existence as a constitutionally recognized autonomous region of Iraq! Their officials would not talk to our officials, despite close economic ties that existed and a vivid need for political dialogue to solve important problems.

Today, not only do we talk, we had the amazing – and wonderful – spectacle of seeing Kurdish children on the streets of Erbil waving Iraqi Kurdish flags AND Turkish flag as the Turkish foreign minister went by.

That was a remarkable day of progress for us.

Another notable day of progress was in July, when there was a historic set of elections for the President and the Parliament of Iraq's Kurdistan Region. These elections were truly a milestone in Kurdistan's journey to democracy as there was both a lively and free campaign period, along with a relatively smooth and trouble free Election Day.

It showed the rest of Iraq and the world what we all knew: that we know how to take the strong steps to make our country better – that we know how to stand up for democracy and move further down that path.

Almost 80 percent of the Region's 2.5 million eligible voters took part in the elections, which the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq and international observers trumpeted as fair and transparent.

These elections are a significant landmark in our Region's history. Several entirely different slates of candidates divided the vote in meaningful way in accordance with the wishes expressed by the citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan. The parties in power lost some support, while continuing to be the largest bloc in the new government, while a healthy opposition gained strength. That means our new government, which took office last month/earlier this month, has both the experience and continuity of progress along with expanded ideas, robust debate and new energy.

Add to those impressive numbers the fact that at least 30 percent of the new Parliament is female. That percentage is greater than in any national or regional government in the Middle East, North America and most of Europe. Moreover, the Parliament has representation from every religious and ethnic constituency within the region.

Thus, the real winner in these elections was the Kurdistan Region itself and not anyone party or slate.

We were challenged by some to hold the gold standard in elections. We accepted that challenge – and we stood up and delivered. That showed the world and our brothers and sisters in Iraq that democracy is strong in our nation.

All of those who observed, monitored or worked the elections praised the way it was run, the enthusiasm and excitement of the voters, and the transparency of the process. "The electoral process took place in accordance with international standards," the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq said in a statement. Among those offering praise were the U.S embassy in Baghdad, the presidency of the European Union, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and bipartisan members of the Kurdish American Congressional Caucus, which said that the July 25 election "is just the latest example" of the Kurdistan Region "moving forward in fulfilling its democratic aspirations."

Fulfilling our democratic aspirations is the key to us. I am quite proud of how democracy is finding a welcome in the Kurdistan Region. None of us had any experience in building a democracy before the opportunity presented itself. But from the moment the political dynamic changed in Iraq in 1992, and then again in 2003, we have been taking steps to ensure that our opportunity is not wasted.

The July 25 elections were about the maturing of our society, the emphasis on the nuts-and-bolts domestic issues that affect people every day of their lives. One of the great Speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, made famous the phrase "All politics is local" and that mantra was evident in Kurdistan on July 25. On key national issues there was not much difference between the slates. Instead it was perspectives on government performance, roads, education, concerns regarding corruption, economic development, water and electricity that shaped the debates and decisions that led up to the July 25 vote. It was a clear marker in the shift from where Kurdish leaders were once hailed for their revolutionary skills to now, where they are chosen on their visions of governance and ability to make each person's life better each day.

As I stated earlier, now there will be an even more vibrant opposition within the Kurdistan parliament. We all expect vigorous debate and there certainly will be new dynamics WITHIN the Kurdistan Regional Government and throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. While President Barzani was reelected by an impressive 69% in the other vote cast on July 25, we will have a new cabinet along with many new members in parliament.

The new dynamic naturally raises questions about what comes next – both within the Kurdistan Region and its relations with the federal government in Baghdad. While it was evident that these elections were primarily about Kurdistan, and not Baghdad the strong voter turnout shows that

all citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan rightfully demand a voice in their affairs and their future – both within the KRG and by extension the federal government.

The Kurdistan Region showed the rest of Iraq and the world what we all knew: that we know how to take strong steps to make our country better—that we know how to stand up for democracy. We are capable to lead Iraq to a new era, as we have proven. We overcame our internal conflicts to establish a Regional government that united the warring political parties. We have worked hard to secure our area from the scourge of terrorism and extremism. We are proud today that not one American has been killed, injured in combat or kidnapped in the Kurdistan Region.

How the U.S. leaves – and remains – in Iraq – is crucial to the stability of the nation and the region. There remain tough internal issues that we Iraqi must work out – revenue sharing, a hydrocarbons law, the future of the dispute territories. Solving these issues is a great priority to our friends in the United States. We realize this and look to whatever guidance and support they can give us. But solving these issues is even a greater priority to us.

While Iraqis of all walks of life have stood up to overcome the gravest of challenges, including terrorism, sectarian violence, political stalemates and regional interference, we remain well aware that in order for the U.S. to stand down, and Iraqis to stand up, in a sustainable and viable federal democracy, continued U.S. engagement, and more importantly, continued U.S. interest in Iraq is paramount.

When we talk about the future of Iraq, here are some points that we feel need to be recognized and appreciated:

- We seek a long term, positive and growing relationship with the United States. We represent what many have declared is impossible – a moderate region which practice Islam but believes in the hope and history of democracy. A coalition of moderate Islam nations and moderate Islam populations, of which the KRI and Iraq is a part, would be a major step forward to a more peaceful world. US strategic interests are best served by close, true working relationships with a coalition of moderate nations.
- The Kurdish people, as well as the KRG, want to continue to build the democracy that we started in 1991 and then accelerated after 2003. We see Iraqi Kurdistan as the gateway for both DEMOCRATIC development and ECONOMIC development for all of Iraq. As citizens of Iraq, we are grateful to have this opportunity to help the nation move forward.
- As many of you know, Kurds have been oppressed for most of the last century and most likely before that. So we are wary of too much power concentrated in the hands of a

central government. We see the Iraqi constitution, which mandates federalism and a devolution of power to the regions and local governments, as the best way to ensure that ALL Iraqis feel safe as well as empowered. And importantly, the constitution is the law of the land – we follow it and expect others to do so as well.

- We have a democracy. It is a new democracy. It is an imperfect democracy – but indeed, it is a true foundation for a strong, vibrant democracy. We have a new press freedom law, which no one else has. When we had our regional elections in July, more than 30 percent of those elected were women – far, far better than anywhere else. EVERY religion and sect that lives in Iraqi Kurdistan is represented and voting in our parliament. All independent observers declared our election free and without incidents – a gold standard, according to some U.S. politicians. We agree. We are not a perfect democracy, but we are on the right path.
- Kurdish political demands are limited, but are fair, deserved and reasonable. The intricate web of relationships between Kurds and regional states means that the future of the Middle East is closely tied to Kurdish futures. Regional and Western policy-makers need to appreciate the role of the Kurds in Iraq, our sacrifices and our contributions. All we ask is to be treated fairly and to work WITH us.
- Article 140 needs to be understood clearly.
- Kurdistan's commitment to being part of Iraq is unshakable and is not hedged.
- It is not accurate (nor fair) to deny the progress being made in Iraqi Kurdistan on a plethora of key benchmark issues – free elections, rights for women and minorities, transparency, security and the war against terrorism, press freedom and democratic principles.

It is time for those of us throughout Iraqi to stand up and lead. The federal parliament was able to reach a consensus of a new election law, so that national elections can take place in January 2010 as required. That showed leadership and an understanding of how to reach agreement in a democratic system of compromise and unity. We stood up that day; we need to do more of that.

As I look at the journey of democracy that is underway in the Kurdistan Region, something the Greek poet Homer once said keeps returning to my mind – “It is not the journey but the destination.” In 17 years since the first elected Regional Government of Kurdistan, those of us who believe in democracy have mapped out our journey and know the destination to which we head. The path has been bumpy – at times very bumpy – and sometimes the route has been obscured. On occasion, the journey has faced roadblocks, some that we have placed for ourselves. But each day, each week, each month, the journey moves forward toward that destination of democracy.

That, to me, is the key.

Knowing where we want to go – where we insist we MUST go – and persevering and pursuing that destination.

The July election is just the latest ingredient of this fervent desire for democracy, peace and opportunity in Iraqi Kurdistan. Decades of oppression and persecution, years of calculated destruction of our homes and genocide of our people, a civil war – all have steeled us with resolve to ensure a better life for our children, our grandchildren and our homeland.

This journey to a democracy is not in a vacuum – it is shaped by the tragedies of the past, the opportunity of the present, and the aspirations of the future.

That is why the world saw so much excitement and passion in the weeks leading up to the July election and in the turnout for the vote. The people of Iraqi Kurdistan are committed to their vision of the future. We have only had 17 years in order to build the foundations for a democratic society. We all know we have much to do. There are many changes to come; just as we have made important progress already, so we will continue to make progress in the future.

We also want to see what we have started blossom throughout Iraq.

Delivery of services, transparency of government and concerns over possible corruption were much talked about issues in the campaigns and rallies and the votes cast at the ballot boxes sent us a clear message – it cannot be business as usual in our approach to tackling these important concerns.

July also was the month when the KRG took another major step to ensuring it can be even more transparent and efficient in its governing. We made a good governance initiative a priority. To that end, we teamed up with world-renowned consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers to review current conditions, the way our government works and all governance related issues – to help us develop a clear-eyed, blunt critique and action plan to address the crucial issues of good governance, anti corruption and transparency.

We know corruption and its allies are dangerous enemies of democracy, because they eat at much of what we in the KRG and those living in Iraqi Kurdistan desire. They make the public cautious about believing in democracy. Corruption and its allies can be an acid that disintegrate democratic progress – and we will not let that happen.

Good governance is a major pillar to securing our democracy. We are confident the strategy outlined by our government, will help us tackle this vital issue.

We've made our region safe and secure. We've overcome our internal conflicts. We've established a system to provide improved services for our citizens. Now we're moving to guarantee that all of this progress is maintained and built upon. The benefits of this strategy are clear and vital for our future. It will help to ensure that public funds are used properly, and make government more efficient and more effective. It will improve the delivery of services to the people of the Kurdistan Region. And it will help improve international and domestic confidence and increase investment and job development, while helping to raise the living standards of our Region.

We understand that democracy is an evolutionary process, both in Iraq and elsewhere.

A young America saw political turmoil through trial and error. Only after a few years of uncertainty and eventual stability, and a decreased threat from outside, did its leaders produce the Constitution of the United States – a document whose noble ideals have been embraced for centuries by freedom seeking people around the world.

Democracy takes time, and the U.S. is more than aware of this fact. That is why we began to act long before the outside world wagged their fingers at us.

For example, large-scale power generation and water delivery progress cannot be bought off the shelf. We have been working for several years to implement effective power and water distribution projects for the key cities. In 2008 the KRG had to deal with TWO failing hydroelectric dams, with the result that government generated electricity fell to only three hours a day in the region.

Of course we found that unacceptable.

Today, our energy projects are nearing completion. We now will have more than 18 hours of power in major cities in the region.

We know there are 24 hours in a day. But we also know that 18 hours is far better than 3 hours. It is a journey.

Likewise, recent completion of a large scale water project in Suleimani complemented a similar project completed in 2008 in Erbil. Those projects will combine with existing systems to provide clean water to much of the Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimani provinces. So that is also getting better.

These are significant accomplishments that have been accomplished by the KRG, and Kurdistan's developing private sector, as the fundamental critical issues that need to be addressed so that those living in Iraqi Kurdistan have the basic needs to start each day with hope and freedom from want.

Providing such essential services is only part of good governance. While that is going on, we have also taken determined steps to strengthen the judiciary and the rule of law -- another vital element needed to build a strong democracy.

In 2008 the judiciary was separated from the rest of the government to create an independent judiciary in Iraqi Kurdistan. That judiciary now is learning how to stand on its own feet, be objective and to uphold the rule of law.

We did this our own. We knew it was the right thing to do. We took these initiatives because this is part of what democracy entails.

This is how we stand up and lead.

These are not the only priorities being pursued. A new press freedom law was passed, religious freedom was strengthened, health care, infrastructure, education reforms are being addressed -- and many more.

Now I must say clearly and bluntly that I am not making excuses about the challenges we face in Iraqi Kurdistan. I am not justifying or rationalizing our less than perfect system, nor am I pretending that problems do not exist. I know we have, on occasion, stumbled, made mistakes and misread circumstances.

Democracy is hard work, but the destination is worth it. Difficult issues remain and the journey faces tough terrain. However, we are still moving forward. This is not a sprint and it should not be. This is the foundation of our future, for our children and grandchildren, for Kurdistan, and Iraq.

Earlier in these remarks, I quoted Homer's view of the journey and the destination. Homer has relevance not for just the statement. It was the Greeks who first developed the principles of democracy that the world has then built upon. Developed by the Greeks and idealized by Americans, democracy in all of its forms remains the most promising form of government ever developed. We in Iraqi Kurdistan are on that journey to that destination of democracy.

Thank you very much. I look forward to your comments and questions.

2010 JUN 25 PM 1:51
CENTRAL REGISTRATION UNIT

Rhodes College, November 18, 2009

Buckman Hall

Memphis, Tennessee

#5943

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2009 JUN 25 PM 2:00
CRM/ISS/REGISTRATION UNIT

It's all in the sauce

Good evening. It is a pleasure to be back here at Rhodes College. A little over two years ago, I visited here. If, as the saying goes, "what a difference a day makes", it is clear that what a tremendous difference two years makes.

Thankfully, those differences in Iraq and in the Kurdistan Region are almost all for the better, with momentum flowing toward the positive. That is indeed heartening after years of uncertainty. While that makes up hopeful for the future, it does not yet ensure all will turn out well.

Thus the designated topic for tonight -- "Iraq: As U.S. Forces Leave Who Is Standing Up?" -- is indeed key. How that is answered in actions (not just words) in large part will determine if in two years hence should I return I will be able to report that today's positives have become tomorrow's foundations for good.

On one basic level, it is easy to answer that question. Who is standing up? -- We are in Kurdistan as are many others throughout Iraq. What cannot be answered TODAY is the follow-up, the NEXT question: we will stand up alone, as individuals or a region -- or stand together to build a new Iraq, one where everyone can enjoy what we in the Kurdistan Region have shown is possible?

As I said for the most part, it has been a very good two years -- we are closing well.

Some of the positive changes are the result of old fashioned hard work and determination, to get to the next goal. Some are the result of help from old friends like the United States and surprisingly newer friends, like Turkey, who are standing up in their own ways. Two years ago -- and I must be honest -- I would have never predicted that by my next visit here Turkey would be opening a diplomatic consular office in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region. Two years ago, Turkey would not even acknowledge

our existence as a constitutionally recognized autonomous region of Iraq! Their officials would not talk to our officials, despite close economic ties that existed and a vivid need for political dialogue to solve important problems.

Today, not only do we talk, we had the amazing – and wonderful – spectacle of seeing Kurdish children on the streets of Erbil waving Iraqi Kurdish flags AND Turkish flag as the Turkish foreign minister went by.

That was a remarkable day of progress for us – one of many since my last visit here.

So people are standing up. Sometimes by design, sometime after being poked to do so.

Perhaps the most notable achievement came in July, when there was a historic set of elections for the President and the Parliament of Iraq's Kurdistan Region. These elections were truly a milestone in Kurdistan's journey to democracy as there was both a lively and free campaign period, along with a relatively smooth and trouble free Election Day.

It showed the rest of Iraq and the world what we all knew: that we know how to take the strong steps to make our country better – that we know how to stand up for democracy and move further down that path.

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These elections are a significant landmark in our Region's history. Several entirely different slates of candidates divided the vote in meaningful way in accordance with the wishes expressed by the citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan. The parties in power lost some support, while continuing to be the largest bloc in the new government, while a healthy opposition gained strength. That means our new government, which took office last month/earlier this month, has both the experience and continuity of progress along with expanded ideas, robust debate and new energy.

Add to those impressive numbers the fact that at least 30 percent of the new Parliament is female. That percentage is greater than in any national or regional government in the Middle East, North America and most of Europe. Moreover, the Parliament has representation from every religious and ethnic constituency within the region.

Thus, the real winner in these elections was the Kurdistan Region itself and not anyone party or slate.

The American president John Adams wrote that "[legislatures] should be an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, feel, reason, and act like them." That is what our Parliament aspires towards.

We were challenged by some to hold the gold standard in elections. We accepted that challenge – and we stood up and delivered.

All of those who observed, monitored or worked the elections praised the way it was run, the enthusiasm and excitement of the voters, and the transparency of the process. "The electoral process took place in accordance with international standards," the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq said in a statement. Among those offering praise were the U.S embassy in Baghdad, the presidency of the European Union, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and bipartisan members of the Kurdish American Congressional Caucus, which said that the July 25 election "is just the latest example" of the Kurdistan Region "moving forward in fulfilling its democratic aspirations."

Fulfilling our democratic aspirations is the key to us. I am quite proud of how democracy is finding a welcome in the Kurdistan Region. None of us had any experience in building a democracy before the opportunity presented itself. But from the moment the political dynamic changed in Iraq in 1992, and then again in 2003, we have been taking steps to ensure that our opportunity is not wasted.

The July 25 elections were about the maturing of our society, the emphasis on the nuts-and-bolts domestic issues that affect people every day of their lives. One of the great Speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, made famous the phrase "All

politics is local” and that mantra was evident in Kurdistan on July 25. On key national issues there was not much difference between the slates. Instead it was perspectives on government performance, roads, education, concerns regarding corruption, economic development, water and electricity that shaped the debates and decisions that led up to the July 25 vote. It was a clear marker in the shift from where Kurdish leaders were once hailed for their revolutionary skills to now, where they are chosen on their visions of governance and ability to make each person’s life better each day.

As I stated earlier, now there will be an even more vibrant opposition within the Kurdistan parliament. We all expect vigorous debate and there certainly will be new dynamics WITHIN the Kurdistan Regional Government and throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. While President Barzani was reelected by an impressive 69% in the other vote cast on July 25, we will have a new cabinet along with many new members in parliament.

The new dynamic naturally raises questions about what comes next – both within the Kurdistan Region and its relations with the federal government in Baghdad. While it was evident that these elections were primarily about Kurdistan, and not Baghdad the strong voter turnout shows that all citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan rightfully demand a voice in their affairs and their future – both within the KRG and by extension the federal government.

So when we ask who will stand when the U.S. forces leave, the elections helped show some of those faces – new and old, determined to move Iraq and the Kurdistan region forward in a progressive, transparent, safe and prosperous way.

How the U.S. leaves – and remains – in Iraq – is crucial to the stability of the nation and the region. There remain tough internal issues that we Iraqi must work out – revenue sharing, a hydrocarbons law, the future of the dispute territories. Solving these issues is a great priority to our friends in the United States. We realize this and look to whatever guidance and support they can give us. But solving these issues is even a greater priority to us.

It is time for those of us throughout Iraqi to stand up and lead. The federal parliament was able to reach a consensus of a new election law, so that national elections can take place in January 2010 as required. That showed leadership and an understanding of how to reach agreement in a democratic system of compromise and unity. We stood up that day; we need to do more of that.

As I look at the journey of democracy that is underway in the Kurdistan Region, something the Greek poet Homer once said keeps returning to my mind – “It is not the journey but the destination.” In 17 years since the first elected Regional Government of Kurdistan, those of us who believe in democracy have mapped out our journey and know the destination to which we head. The path has been bumpy – at times very bumpy – and sometimes the route has been obscured. On occasion, the journey has faced roadblocks, some that we have placed for ourselves. But each day, each week, each month, the journey moves forward toward that destination of democracy.

That, to me, is the key.

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The July election is just the latest ingredient of this fervent desire for democracy, peace and opportunity in Iraqi Kurdistan. Decades of oppression and persecution, years of calculated destruction of our homes and genocide of our people, a civil war – all have steeled us with resolve to ensure a better life for our children, our grandchildren and our homeland.

This journey to a democracy is not in a vacuum – it is shaped by the tragedies of the past, the opportunity of the present, and the aspirations of the future.

That is why the world saw so much excitement and passion in the weeks leading up to the July election and in the turnout for the vote. The people of Iraqi Kurdistan are committed to their vision of the future. We have only had 17 years in order to build the foundations for a democratic society. We all know we have much to do. There are many

changes to come; just as we have made important progress already, so we will continue to make progress in the future.

We also want to see what we have started blossom throughout Iraq.

Delivery of services, transparency of government and concerns over possible corruption were much talked about issues in the campaigns and rallies and the votes cast at the ballot boxes sent us a clear message – it cannot be business as usual in our approach to tackling these important concerns.

July also was the month when the KRG took another major step to ensuring it can be even more transparent and efficient in its governing. We made a good governance initiative a priority. To that end, we teamed up with world-renowned consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers to review current conditions, the way our government works and all governance related issues – to help us develop a clear-eyed, blunt critique and action plan to address the crucial issues of good governance, anti corruption and transparency.

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Good governance is a major pillar to securing our democracy. We are confident the strategy outlined by our government, will help us tackle this vital issue.

We've made our region safe and secure. We've overcome our internal conflicts. We've established a system to provide improved services for our citizens. Now we're moving to guarantee that all of this progress is maintained and built upon. The benefits of this strategy are clear and vital for our future. It will help to ensure that public funds are used properly, and make government more efficient and more effective. It will improve the delivery of services to the people of the Kurdistan Region. And it will help improve international and domestic confidence and increase investment and job development, while helping to raise the living standards of our Region.

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Democracy takes time, and the U.S. is more than aware of this fact. That is why we began to act long before the outside world wagged their fingers at us.

For example, large-scale power generation and water delivery progress cannot be bought off the shelf. We have been working for several years to implement effective power and water distribution projects for the key cities. In 2008 the KRG had to deal with TWO failing hydroelectric dams, with the result that government generated electricity fell to only three hours a day in the region.

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Democracy is hard work, but the destination is worth it. Difficult issues remain and the journey faces tough terrain. However, we are still moving forward. This is not a sprint and it should not be. This is the foundation of our future, for our children and grandchildren, for Kurdistan, and Iraq.

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Thank you very much. I look forward to your comments and questions.

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2009 JUN 25 PM 2:06
COMMUNICATION UNIT

**Remarks to the Middle East Institute on the
Kurdistan Region of Iraq elections of 25 July 2009
by Qubad Talabani, representative of the
Kurdistan Regional Government to the United
States**

August 11, 2009, Washington, D.C.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk to you about our recent elections, and the general progress being made in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

I have just returned to the US, off the back of an historic set of elections for the President and the Parliament of Iraq's Kurdistan Region. These elections were truly a milestone in Kurdistan's journey to democracy as there was both a lively and free campaign period, along with a relatively smooth and trouble free Election Day.

Almost 80 percent of the Region's 2.5 million eligible voters took part in the elections, which the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq and international observers trumpeted as fair and transparent.

These elections are a significant landmark in our Region's history. Several entirely different slates of candidates divided up the vote in meaningful way in accordance with the wishes expressed by the citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan. The parties in power lost some support, while continuing to be the largest bloc in the new government, while a healthy opposition gained strength. That means our next government will have both the experience and continuity of progress along with expanded ideas, robust debate and new energy.

Add to those impressive numbers the fact that at least 30 percent of the new Parliament will be female. That percentage is greater than in any national or regional government in the Middle East, North America and most of Europe. Moreover, the Parliament has representation from every religious and ethnic constituency within the region.

So the real winner in these elections was the Kurdistan Region itself and not anyone party or slate.

The American president John Adams wrote that "[legislatures] should be an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, feel, reason, and act like them." That is what our Parliament aspires towards.

We were challenged by some to hold the gold standard in elections. We accepted that challenge – and we delivered. We have achieved much in our experiment in democratic self governance, – and of course there is much more to achieve. And we intend to achieve it.

All of those who observed, monitored or worked the elections praised the way it was run, the enthusiasm and excitement of the voters, and the transparency of the process. "The electoral process took place in accordance with international standards," the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq said in a statement. It said that only 651 complaints had been filed regarding just a small number of the total vote.

Because the objective voices of others are often not heard in the din of self-serving bloggings and pontificating, I also feel it is important to share what those with no vested interest have said about the election. I promise, just a few – but like a proud parent, I want to share ALL the great comments others have said about us.

- The **U.S. Embassy in Baghdad**, in a statement, congratulated “the people of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq for coming out to vote in large numbers for the regional presidential and parliamentary elections, thus demonstrating their commitment to the democratic process.”
- The **Presidency of the European Union**, which sent observers to polling stations across the region and helped with a long term electoral experts’ mission, congratulated the people of the Iraqi Kurdistan for holding the elections “in a relatively competitive environment and were carried out in a secure manner. The high voter turnout, preliminary 78.5 %, shows the commitment of the voters to express their political will in a democratic way,” the statement said.
- The **United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq** (UNAMI) congratulated election officials and the people of Kurdistan “for the large turnout, especially among women voters, in last week's peaceful elections” and praised voters for exercising “their right to elect new regional, parliamentary, and presidential representatives, in an orderly environment, notably free of violence.”
- Bipartisan members of the **Kurdish American Congressional Caucus** said the successful elections “marked yet another milestone in the Region’s development towards a democratic and transparent society. For that, we applaud them.

They said the July 25 election “is just the latest example” of the Kurdistan Region “moving forward in fulfilling its democratic aspirations.”

Fulfilling our democratic aspirations is the key to us. I am quite proud of how democracy is finding a welcome in the

Kurdistan Region. None of us had any experience in building a democracy before the opportunity presented itself. But from the moment the political dynamic changed in Iraq in 1992, and then again in 2003, we have been taking steps to ensure that our opportunity is not wasted.

The July 25 elections were about the maturing of our society, the emphasis on the nuts-and-bolts domestic issues that affect people every day of their lives. One of the great Speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, made famous the phrase "All politics is local" and that mantra was evident in Kurdistan on July 25. On key national issues there was not much difference between the slates. Instead it was perspectives on government performance, roads, education, concerns regarding corruption, economic development, water and electricity that shaped the debates and decisions that led up to the July 25 vote. It was a clear marker in the shift from where Kurdish leaders were once hailed for their revolutionary skills to now, where they are chosen on their visions of governance and ability to make each person's life better each day.

AS stated earlier, now there will be an even more vibrant opposition within the Kurdistan parliament. We all expect vigorous debate and there certainly will be new dynamics WITHIN the Kurdistan Regional Government and throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. While President Barzani was reelected by an impressive 69% in the other vote cast on July 25, we will have a new cabinet along with many new members in parliament.

The new dynamic naturally raises questions about what comes next – both within the Kurdistan Region and its relations with the federal government in Baghdad. While it was evident that these elections were primarily about Kurdistan, and not Baghdad the strong voter turnout shows that all citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan rightfully demand

a voice in their affairs and their future – both within the KRG and by extension the federal government.

And I think Baghdad has already taken notice. Shortly after the elections the Prime Minister of Iraq, his Excellency Nouri al-Maliki, journeyed to the Kurdistan Region to meet with our Region's leaders. It was a significant gesture on his part to help revive discussions on the issues that MUST be resolved sooner rather than later in order for all of Iraq to move forward. We in Kurdistan appreciated the gesture and we are sending a delegation to Baghdad to continue to work on resolving these outstanding issues.

Solving these issues is a great priority to our friends in the United States. We realize this and look to whatever guidance and support they can give us. But solving these issues is even a greater priority to us.

No matter what the make up is of the parliament, the election leaders of the Kurdistan Region are united in our determination that the Region be treated fairly and in accordance with the nation's constitution, in terms of national laws regarding consensual governance, disputed territories and hydro carbons and revenue sharing. The July election may change some of the faces, but it will not change our focus and unity on resolving these issues fairly.

As I look at the journey of democracy that is underway in the Kurdistan Region, something the Greek poet Homer once said keeps returning to my mind – "It is not the journey but the destination." In 17 years since the first elected Regional Government of Kurdistan, those of us who believe in democracy have mapped out our journey and know the destination to which we head. The path has been bumpy – at times very bumpy – and sometimes the route has been obscured. On occasion, the journey has faced roadblocks, some that we have placed for ourselves. But each day, each week, each month, the journey moves forward toward that destination of democracy.

That, to me, is the key.

Knowing where we want to go – where we insist we MUST go – and persevering and pursuing that destination.

The July election is just the latest ingredient of this fervent desire for democracy, peace and opportunity in Iraqi Kurdistan. Decades of oppression and persecution, years of calculated destruction of our homes and genocide of our people, a civil war – all have steeled us with resolve to ensure a better life for our children, our grandchildren and our homeland.

This journey to a democracy is not in a vacuum – it is shaped by the tragedies of the past, the opportunity of the present, and the aspirations of the future.

That is why the world saw so much excitement and passion in the weeks leading up to this election and in the turnout for the vote. The people of Iraqi Kurdistan are committed to their vision of the future. We have only had 17 years in order to build the foundations for a democratic society . We all know we have much to do. There are many changes to come; just as we have made important progress already, so we will continue to make progress in the future.

We also want to see what we have started blossom throughout Iraq.

Delivery of services, transparency of government and concerns over possible corruption were much talked about issues in the campaigns and rallies and the votes cast at the ballot boxes sent us a clear message – it cannot be business as usual in our approach to tackling these important concerns.

July also was the month when the KRG took another major step to ensuring it can be even more transparent and

efficient in its governing. We made a good governance initiative a priority. To that end we teamed up with world renowned consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers to review current conditions, the way our government works and all governance related issues – to help us develop a clear-eyed, blunt critique and action plan to address the crucial issues of good governance, anti corruption and transparency.

We know corruption and its allies are dangerous enemies of democracy, because they eat at much of what we in the KRG and those living in Iraqi Kurdistan desire. They make the public cautious about believing in democracy. Corruption and its allies can be an acid that disintegrate democratic progress – and we will not let that happen.

Good governance is a major pillar to securing our democracy. We are confident the strategy outlined by our government, will help us tackle this vital issue.

This multi-year endeavor will ultimately improve how our government serves its people. Compliant with the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, the KRG good governance and transparency initiative represents a very bold step.

We've made our region safe and secure. We've overcome our internal conflicts. We've established a system to provide improved services for our citizens. Now we're moving to guarantee that all of this progress is maintained and built upon. The benefits of this strategy are clear and vital for our future. It will help to ensure that public funds are used properly, and make government more efficient and more effective. It will improve the delivery of services to the people of the Kurdistan Region. And it will help improve international and domestic confidence and increase investment and job development, while helping to raise the living standards of our Region.

This strategy is based on four principles:

Adherence to the Rule of Law: To ensure that no one in government, regardless of position, is above the law.

Every KRG Official is Accountable: to act in the interests of the Kurdistan Region and its citizens, and will promote those interests above their own, their family or political party.

Transparent Government Promotes Kurdistan: To provide citizens with access to information on the operations of government, which is indispensable to ensuring that KRG officials remain accountable to the voters.

Public Funds Must Always Be Used for Their Intended Purpose:

The KRG's Good Governance and Transparency Initiative represents tangible evidence that we are not only aware of our shortcomings, but that we are actually doing something about them. While we work to address these shortcomings, it is imperative that we should not lose sight of how much progress has been made in a remarkably short, yet tumultuous period of time.

We understand that democracy is an evolutionary process, both in Iraq and elsewhere.

A young America saw political turmoil through trial and error. Only after a few years of uncertainty and eventual stability, and a decreased threat from outside, did its leaders produce the Constitution of the United States – a document whose noble ideals have been embraced for centuries by freedom seeking people around the world.

Democracy takes time, and the U.S. is more than aware of this fact.

In 1963, when Dr. Martin Luther King gave his "I Have A Dream" speech, African-Americans were barely able to vote in many parts of this country. Now, 45 years since passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 44 years since enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Americans have elected an African American President. We say that is a huge step for democracy here. It took time, a long way since 1787, but it finally happened.

People are eager to declare that Iraqi Kurdistan has faltered in its journey to build a democracy, that we deserve scorn because we are not perfect after 17 years.

That is nonsense.

One cannot create a perfect democracy over night or even in 17 years. If that formula exists- please share it with us. When Saddam Hussein's tyranny was finally removed from Iraq, we had to start governing as best we could. We had to pick the priorities – what had to be done first – and bide our time until some other important measures could be addressed properly. Not with haste just so we can say we did it, but to do it with substance and long term stability.

In 2006, when the KRG unity government was formed we knew our priorities at that point. Stabilize the region and increase our security and counter-terrorism capabilities to prevent the insurgency that was tearing apart much of Iraq from inflicting its destruction in Iraqi Kurdistan. Create a safe haven for all Iraqis fleeing the violence – and do it in way that all were taken care of as best as possible.

That has happened. Without security and safety, nothing else can progress with certainty. So now, other priorities CAN be pursued, with good governance and performing essential services atop that list.

Some have chosen to question our delivery of services, noting that it is often below standard and needs improving. We know that – and we were just reminded of that fact by our voters! Decades of devastation, neglect by former Iraqi regimes, U.N., Iraqi and regional sanctions and our mismanagement did not give us a level playing field when our journey to democracy took its first steps.

That is why we began to act long before the outside world wagged their fingers at us.

As you all know, large scale power generation and water delivery progress cannot be bought off the shelf. We have been working for several years to implement effective power and water distribution projects for the key cities. In 2008 the KRG had to deal with TWO failing hydroelectric dams, with the result that government generated electricity fell to only three hours a day in the region.

Of course we found that unacceptable.

Today, our energy projects are nearing completion. We now will have more than 18 hours of power in major cities in the region.

We know there are 24 hours in a day. But we also know that 18 hours is far better than 3 hours. It is a journey.

Likewise, recent completion of a large scale water project in Suleimani complemented a similar project completed in 2008 in Erbil. Those projects will combine with existing systems to provide clean water to much of the Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimani provinces. So that is also getting better.

These are significant accomplishments that have been accomplished by the KRG, and Kurdistan's developing private sector, as the fundamental critical issues that need to be addressed so that those living in Iraqi Kurdistan have the basic needs to start each day with hope and freedom from want.

Providing such essential services is only part of good governance. While that is going on, we have also taken determined steps to strengthen the judiciary and the rule of law -- another vital element needed to build a strong democracy.

In 2008 the judiciary was separated from the rest of the government to create an independent judiciary in Iraqi Kurdistan. That judiciary now is learning how to stand on its own feet, be objective and to uphold the rule of law.

We did this our own. We knew it was the right thing to do. We took these initiatives because this is part of what democracy entails.

And these are not the only priorities being pursued. A new press freedom law was passed; religious freedom was strengthened, health care, infrastructure, education reforms

are being addressed – and many more. We can talk of those another day.

Now I must say clearly and bluntly that I am not making excuses about the challenges we face in Iraqi Kurdistan. I am not justifying or rationalizing our less than perfect system, nor am I pretending that problems do not exist. I know we have, on occasion, stumbled, made mistakes and misread circumstances, and we expect to make more mistakes going forward.

But these perplexing desires by many to highlight the negative makes us wonder sometimes of what people want from us. This is not a question of the glass being half empty or half full – to these individuals, the glass has a permanent sieve.

So why is this, these stories and pontifications, by some scholars and bloggers, talking only of the negative? Many of the reasons are clear – lack of true knowledge of what is going on in Iraqi Kurdistan, pure bias, the desire to make a name for one's self by being provocative regardless of accuracy. It has become a very successful cottage industry – one whose benefits achieve nothing toward the goal they proclaim they want – a better democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan OR in Iraq. But it serves their personal purposes.

Most reporters who now cover Iraq have a history of the country that starts in 2003, at best. They know little of the past, almost never visit the Kurdistan Region let alone spend time there. They do no "Know Kurdistan."

It is telling to compare what is written or said by those who know the full story and history – the coverage is remarkably different. This past election proved that – the coverage was detailed and fair, instructive and objective and education. It is time that people truly "Know Kurdistan." Our election opened many eyes. We hope that minds will also become open.

There are no shortcuts to democracy. It is hard work, but the destination is worth it. Democracy is the toughest political system in the world to achieve because it is the best. In our journey toward democracy, we will make mistakes, we will learn from them and hopefully we will not repeat them. And from those mistakes – and from the much greater that is being done correctly – the foundation for our democracy becomes stronger.

From 2000 to 2005 there was remarkable growth in democratic freedom in Iraqi Kurdistan. It has slowed down since then, but it is still moving forward. The July election, among other things, gave it tremendous new momentum.

Difficult issues remain and the journey faces tough terrain. But we are still moving forward. This is not a sprint and it should not be. This is the foundation of our future, for our children and grandchildren, for Kurdistan, and Iraq.

At the beginning of these remarks, I quoted Homer's view of the journey and the destination. Homer has relevance not for just the statement. It was the Greeks who first developed the principles of democracy that the world has then built upon. Developed by the Greeks and idealized by Americans, democracy in all of its forms remains the most promising form of government ever developed. We in Iraqi Kurdistan are on that journey to that destination of democracy.

Someday, we will get there. I guarantee it.

Thank you very much.

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KRG 2009 Public Affairs Report

We devised and executed an aggressive and creative PR plan for the Kurdistan Regional Government-US Liaison office for 2009. The foundation of 2008 opened the door to the opportunity to be proactive, sturdy, steady and unrelenting. That is what we achieved.

The effort required coordination and consistency. We reduced freelancing off message. The 2009 Public Affairs activities captured many of the goals outlined and approved in January 2009, as well as dealing with the management of two major public relations agencies into both the media awareness activities and budget. The year's deliverables and focuses were bifurcated: there was attention and consistency to following the designed, pro-active and approved public relations plan (and building on those activities) and then there was the management, diversion and development of time/budget/creativity on support work and instructional monitoring.

Overview of the priority goals achieved:

Major policy speeches and appearances that build on a consistent, pro-active and progressive message

Creation of an up-to-date media list, with key targeted media operatives for relationship development

Wider recognition of the KRG's progressive press freedom law

Construction, launch and implementation of an advertising campaign touting the KRG's progressive press freedom law

Interviews, assistance and response to more than 50 media outlets

Pure, unfettered analysis of public/media opinion of the Kurds and Iraqi Kurdistan

Smart, sophisticated brochures and collateral material for the KRG-US office

Crafted meaningful press releases on key visits, events and appropriate moments

Constructed pitch-perfect phrases and memorable message points in speeches

Successful cultivation of New York Times editorial board

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KRG-US LIAISON UNIT

Team designated goal of four major hits (achieved)

- Washington Times message story in the spring
- Washington Times message story in the fall
- Package of coverage in regards to opening of new KRG US headquarters
- Freedom of the press ad
- U.S. directed coverage/encouragement of KRI July elections; following up coverage

In connection and in concert with those game plan goals:

Creation of a new web site for the Washington office

Creation of a new media kit

Created and wrote, then secured publication, of stories regarding the culture, art and history of the new KRG headquarters

Promotion of Qubad Talabani a key individual in Washington, D.C.

Resurrection of the Kurds vote web site for the KRI elections

Development of a more relevant press media list

Key analysis of KRG public image (May-June)

Drafted speeches

Content for web sites

Liaison and garnered press attention to the Halabja United Nations event in NYC

Last-minute creation of story board content for Halabja event

Research on women's Congressional women's caucus; Human rights groups, religious groups, to use as third party advocates during July election

Research on transparency groups to tout Price Waterhouse actions. (Global Financial Integrity)

Profiles of QT

Continual updating of message points

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

SPEECHES and REMARKS

Houston chamber of commerce

Atlantic Council remarks

Oil and gas conference, Houston

Middle East Institute

Arizona State University

Chamber of commerce investment publication release 2nd year

Council of Foreign Relations

American University

George Mason University

Rhodes College

Knight Center for Specialized Journalism

Brookings's US National Security Policy

Idaho Farm Bureau

Carnegie Middle East Program (Preventing Conflict Over Kurdistan)

OTHER PUBLIC AWARENESS OUTREACH

University professors going to KRI (Dr. Andrew Hess; Dr. Burdett Loomis)

Friends of Kurdistan list

"Thank You For My Eyes" pre-documentary work

Statement by KRG praising last January election (even though KRI did not participate)

Op-ed y Lincoln Davis and Joe Wilson on elections

Kurdsvote.org website

KnowKurdistan website

ADS

Freedom of the press ad

Abraham Lincoln centennial

Package of ads designed for Ski Kurdistan; The Mountains Are Now Your Friend; Seeds of Democracy; A Great Place to Grow (Investment)

PRESS MEETINGS/comments/input include:

CNN

Tammam Al-Barazi, Journalist, Al Watan Al Arabi

Kevin Bogardus, The Hill

Deborah Akel, Viewpoint with James Zogby

Laura Rozen, Politico/Foreign Policy Review

USATODAY/Jim Michaels and David Lynch,

Al Jazeera English

BBC

C-SPAN

United Nations Correspondents Association

Jill Junnola, Energy Intelligence

Roula Khalaf, Middle East Editor, Financial Times

Ahu Ozyurt, turkey CNN

Stars and Stripes

MSNBC

Al Hurra Television,

Peter K. Semler, Washington Bureau Chief, dealReporter

Elcin Poyrazlar, Cumhuriyet

Tolga Tanış Hurriyet

Capitol File

The Washington Dish

Washington Life

Josh Rogin, Staff Writer - The Cable, Foreign Policy Magazine

Farah Stockman, Boston Globe

Nada Charara ,MBN TV & Radio

Alhurra, Berivan Yousify

CNBC Anchor Erin Burnett

Roll Call

Global Security News

National Review

Ayla Jean Yackley, thomsonreuters.com

Cameron Barr, Washington post

National Public Radio

James Glanz, NY Times

Ben Lando, Iraqi Oil Report

Rania Todoulou World Profile Group

Oliver August, The Times of London & The Economist

James Verini, NY Times magazine

Marissa Taylor, McClatchy

The New Yorker

Sharmila Devi, The National

Peter Abraham, DC Magazine

Josh Rogin, Congressional Quarterly.

Gabriela Iancu, Columbia University (Re: Nation Building in Kurdistan)

Clinton Cossette, Impact Radio

Max Pringle, KPFA Radio in San Francisco.

Free press law outreach:

American Society of Business Publication Editors

AAJA

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

Association of Alternative Newsweeklies

Association of Health Care Journalists

Alternet

American Society of Newspaper Editors

ASNE High School Journalism Initiative

Capitol Correspondents Association of California

Center for Media & Democracy

CMPA

Committee to Protect Journalists

Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma

Education Writers Association

The Freedom Forum

I Want Media

Knight Center for Specialized Journalism

Knight Digital Media Center

Local TV News Media Project!

The Maynard Institute

Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education
The Media Channel

The Media Institute

Media Tenor

NABJ

The National Association of Hispanic Journalists
National Freedom of Information Coalition

NLGJA

National Press Club

Native American Journalists Association
Newslab

Overseas Press Club

Human Rights Watch

Committee to Protect Journalists

Freedom House

Christiana Aramapour

A-19 law group

Jane Arraf

Eason Jordan

Reporters Without Borders

International Freedom of Expression Exchange

World Association of Newspapers

UNESCO

Gene Policinski, vice president and executive director of the First Amendment Center